Seeing Life With John Henry

By GEORGE V. HOBART

Steb Stephens, Head Clerk of Commercial House, Knows Humanity's Funny Foibles and Flash Kids.

Splashburg, Middle West Boom Burg, Where Trains Never Meet and Drummers Invariably Do.

"Let a peep out of him about the pie he had for dinner."

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IF YOU'LL look real close you'll find Splashburg on a map of the Middle West.

It's a railroad junction where careless travelers change cars and wait for the other train, which is always late.

A week ago I happened to be one of those careless travelers, marooned in Splashburg, and having a wicked hour or two to kill I strolled over to the Commercial House.

Steb Stephens is the name of the head clerk at the Commercial House in Splashburg. Steb has been throwing keys at the wall for a long time and he knows how to burn the beefers.

He played the Big Time once. Yes, years ago he was a bell hop at the old Willard in Washington, and after that he jumped to Chicago as night porter at the old Sherman House; so what Steb doesn't know about the hotel business isn't worth whimpering over.

Steb gave me a brief outline of his life's history and was just starting in to tell me about the battle in the Civil War in which his father was shot and who shot him when a feverish old party with Persian rug trimmings on the end of his chin squeezed up and began to let a peep out of him about the pie he had eaten for dinner.

"Calm yourself," said Smiling Steb, "and tell me where it bit you."

"Bit me! Bit me!" snarled the Old Party with the tapestry chinpiece. "Nothing of the kind, sir! I want you to know, sir, that your pie isn't fit to eat, sir!"

"Cut it out!" suggested Steb.

"Cut it out, sir! How can I cut it out when I've eaten it, sir? It's an outrage, and I shall leave this hotel tomorrow," said Omar Khayyam.

"With the exception of $31.72, balance due, that will be about all from you," said Steb.

"I'll see the proprietor," said the Old Party, moving away with a face on him like four dollars in bad money.

"We get it good and plenty every day," said Steb, and just then something about six feet tall, wearing a slouch hat and a gilt mustache, fell against the counter, grabbed the register, and buried a stub pen in its pages.

After looking over the result, I decided the stranger's first name must be Spider, because it looked like one on the register.

"Bath?" queried Steb.

"Only during a hot wave," said Spider.

Steb went to the ropes, but he came up smiling, as usual.

"American or European?" asked Steb.

"Neither," said Spider. "Don't you see I'm from Jersey City?"

"Going to be with us long?" inquired Steb.

"Say, Bub, you're wearing medals for asking questions, now ain't you?" answered Spider. "You just push me into a stall and lock the gate. I'm tired."

"Front! Show this gentleman to 49!" said Steb, sidestepping to avoid punishment.

Then Sweet William, the Boy Drummer, hopped into the ring for the next round.

Willie peddles pickles for the fun he gets out of it. It is Willie's joy and delight to get a ginger-ale pun on and recite "Ostler Joe."

When trained down to 95 flat, Willie can get up and beat the clapper off "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight."

When Willie gets a strangle hold on "Sheridan's Ride" you can hear horses galloping outside.

It's the rest of the community getting out of harm's way.

"Any mail?" inquired Willie.

All the mail that Willie ever gets is a postal card from the pickle factory every two weeks asking him if the people along his route have all lost their appetites.

"No literature for you," Steb answered.

"Strange," said Willie, "my lady friends are very remiss, aren't they?"

"Yes; it looks like they were out to drop you behind the piano," said Steb.

Willie tore off a short rabbit laugh, and then inquired what time the next train left for New York.

The pickle factory expects Willie to make Pocomoke City, Squashtown Junction, and Nubbinsville before next Sunday, so he tossed the train gag out just to show Steb that he knew there's a place called New York.

"At 7:45 over the D. L. & Q.," said Steb.

"What's the next?" inquired Willie.

"At 8:10 over the H. B. & N.," Steb answered.

"Which gets there first?" Willie asked.

"The engineer," sighed Steb.

"Oh, you droll chap," said the pickle-pusher; 'give me some tooth-picks."

Then Sweet William went over to the big window, burrowed into a chair, stuck his feet up on the brass rail, ate tooth-picks, and thought he was IT.

When I got back to Steb he was dealing out the cards to a lady from Reading, Pa.

Her husband had been up in the air with a bum automobile, and when he came down he was several sections shy.

They found a monkey wrench imbedded in his left shoulder which he couldn't remember using when he tried to fix the machine.

She was traveling for his health.

"My room is immediately over the kitchen," she informed Steb.

"The cook hasn't made a kick up to now," Steb went back at her.

"But they've been frying onions ever since we took the room yesterday afternoon," she snapped.

"Yes, madam," chortled Smiling Steb. "This is a local-option town, and the onion is the only pickle that's allowed to appear in public."

She started a get-back, but her indignation choked her so she gave Steb the Society sting with both eyes and flounced out.

Steb bit the end off a penholder and said the rest internally.

Just then a couple of troupers trailed in.

They were with the "Bandit's Bride Co.," and the way had been long and weary.

"What have you got—double?" asked the villain of the piece.

"Two dollars and up!" said Steb.

"Nothing better?" inquired Low Comedy. He was making a crack, but nobody caught him.

"Four dollars, with bath," Steb suggested.

"Board?" asked the villain.

"Nothing but the sleeps and a fresh cake of soap," said Steb.

"Ring down!" Low Comedy put in. "Why, we lived a whole week in Pittsburgh for less than that."

"You can turn the same trick here if you carry your own cake and sleep in the Park," said Steb.

"What's the name of this mint?" asked the villain.

Steb told him.

"To the towpath!" said Barrett Macready. "We're outside the life lines. We thought it was the Liverwurst Hotel, where they throw things at your appetite for $1 a day, double. To the left, wheel! Forward, march!"

I followed the two troupers out to the dinky barroom, because it looked about eight to one they'd pull a few wheezes and I'd get a few guffs.

"The woods for ours! Isn't this a bird of a place for a show to get stranded?" groaned the Low Comic, as he gave the Rube bartender the high sign, and the latter pushed forward two glasses and a black bottle.

"It wouldn't have been so bad if the show had gone to pieces in some burg where the people have insomnia in the daytime," the Juvenile growled. "But here, Mike, the men go to work in their pajamas, and the town hasn't any street cars because the conductor's bell sounds too much like an alarm clock, and it might wake the Mayor."

"I tell you, Mike," the Juvenile went on, "I'm too delicate for this one-night stand gag. I'm going to New York and build a theater."

"What with?" sneered Low Comedy.

"With a reporter I know on one of the papers," the Juvenile chuckled. "Say, what was the name of that town we played night before last?"

"Murphy's Landing, wasn't it?" Mike answered.

"I guess that's right, because Murphy landed on me good and hard," the Juvenile said. "Remember those nice white doorknobs we ate for breakfast next morning? The waitress said they were hot biscuits, but I had to eat mine with a nut cracker. I've got it in my pantry yet, and every time I walk around the knob turns, and I can hear a door open somewhere."

"Remember those nice white doorknobs we ate for breakfast next morning."

Mike's double chin showed signs of agitation.

"Stranded here in this jay town!" The Juvenile grabbed the black bottle and upset it again. "Say, Mike, what we need is a guardian. And while we're at it let's pick out one with money so we can wire him for a little price to help us out on occasions like this. The next manager that wins me away from the stockyards will have to wear a gold-plaited overcoat and stand in the wings every night where he can throw ten-dollar bills at me when I make my exit. No more slob impresarios for mine, with nothing in their inside pockets but a date book and a hearty appetite."

"Same here!" Low Comedy nodded. "The next manager that picks me out will have to drag me down to his bank and let me pick his coupons off the shelf before I'll sign."

"Bumped, good and hard, here in the tall grass," the Juvenile complained again, "and not a cookie in the lunchbasket. Say! It has me winging, all right, and that's no idle hoot! This is the third troupe that blew out its mainspring for us this season, and I'm beginning to believe we ought to get vaccinated. How am I going to do Hamlet in New York this winter, I'd like to know? Eight weeks since we left Chicago, three shows to the bad, and still a thousand miles from the Great White Way. Say, Mike, at this rate it'll take about 629 shows to get us to Jersey City. Are you hep?"

Mike laughed. "It's the old story, my boy; we're a sad bunch of plowboys on this old farm of a world when we haven't a little mazuma in the vest pocket. I've got a new bit of recitation spiel I cooked up last night when I couldn't sleep. It's called "Knock and the World Knocks With You," and I'll put you jerry to it right now before it gets cold!

Knock, and the world knocks with you,
Boost and you boost alone!
When you roast good and loud
You will find that the crowd
Has a hammer as big as your own!

Buy, and the gang is with you;
Renig, and the game's all off;
For the lad with the thirst
Will see you first
If you don't proceed to cough!

Be rich and the push will praise you,
Be poor and they'll pass the ice,
You're a warm young guy
When you start to buy—
You're a slob when you lose the price!

Be flush and your friends are many,
Go broke and they'll say Ta, ta!
While your bank account burns
You will get returns,
When it's out you will get the Ha!

Be gay and the mob will cheer you,
They'll shout while your wealth endures;
Show a tearful lamp
And you'll see them tramp—
And it's back to the woods for yours!

There's always a bunch to boost you
While at your money they glance;
But you'll find them all gone
On that cold gray dawn
When the fringe arrives on your pants!

"You've got the game of life sized to a showdown," was the Juvenile's comment.

At this point Jabe, the Rube bartender, pointed a freckled finger at Mike and butted in with: "Say, you be the fat cuss that cut up with that troupe at the Op'ry House last night, been't ye?"

"No, I'm the skeleton man with a circus," Mike answered, and the bartender roared with delight.

"You don't look as how you took much exercise," snickered Jabe.

"But I do take exercise. Oh, me for that exercise thing, good and strong!" protested Mike.

"What kind of exercise do you take?" Jabe inquired.

"Well," Mike answered, "every morning I swing the clubs for fifteen minutes, then the dumbbells for ten minutes, then I run about three miles—and then I get up and eat my breakfast."

Jabe guffawed loudly over this bit of facetiousness.

"I was at the Op'ry House last night," Jabe informed them, "and I 'most laughed myself sick to the stomach at this yere fat cuss takin' off that Dutch policeman—ha, ha, ha, ha!" Jabe looked at the Juvenile. "You was putty good, too," he admitted, "takin' off that newspaper reporter and rescuin' the girl from the burnin' structure, but you didn't do no funny fall and bust your gallusses like this yer fat cuss—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Get him to unhook the laugh; he's a good steady listener," whispered the Juvenile, and Mike started in.

"Fine town, this," Mike began. "All the modern improvements, eh? Cows wear nickel-plated bells, streets paved with grass, and the river has running water."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" Jabe roared.

"Reminds me of a place we struck out in Missouri last winter," Mike went on. "Same style of public architecture, especially the town pump. But the hotel there was the hit with us. It was called the Declaration of Independence because the proprietor had married an Englishwoman and wanted to be revenged. At supper time I ordered a steak, and they brought me a leather hinge covered with gravy, so I got up to add an amendment to the Declaration of Independence. The head waiter was an ex-pugilist, so he put the boots to me and covered my amendment with bruises. Then he made me eat the leather hinge, and for two weeks I felt like a garden gate and I used to slam every time the wind blew."

Jabe's laugh shook the building.

"The proprietor of that hotel was so patriotic," Mike continued, "that he wouldn't number the rooms like any ordinary hotel. Every room was named in honor of a President of the United States. That evening there happened to be a rush while I was standing near the desk, and I heard the clerk say: 'Front, show these gentlemen up to John Quincy Adams, and tell the porter to take that trunk out of the alcove in Thomas Jefferson. Front, go and put down that window in Rutherford B. Hayes, and, here, take this whisky up to Abraham Lincoln. Front, what's all that racket in James Buchanan? Here, take these cigars to U. S. Grant, and turn off the gas in Teddy Roosevelt.' But I nearly fainted when he said, 'Front, run a sofa into James A. Garfield, and take this lady up to George Washington.'"

"Mortal Caesar! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared Jabe. "Daggone if that ain't funny, you fat cuss!"

When I quit them to make my train Mike had worn finger marks on the side of the black bottle and Jabe had signed a verbal contract to go on the stage as the Juvenile's dresser.

All of which goes to prove that Splashburg isn't so bad provided you don't have to wait very long for a train out.

Beth's Patient

By Izola Forrester

(Copyright, 1914.)

"I should humor him until the crisis is past, Miss Powell. In these typhoid cases, we find some peculiar manifestations as the patient loses strength. He is totally unconscious of who you are, and merely connects you with this other mental picture. You understand?"

"Yes, Doctor," returned Beth, obediently. She stood by the cot after the door had closed, looking down at the patient. He had been brought in the week before from one of the large hotels. She understood that he seemed well supplied with money. His doctor had engaged a private room and nurses. She was the night nurse.

It was her first year of active service. Up home in Oregon they had taken it as a sort of joke when Beth, joyous, outdoor loving Beth, decided to leave her garden and books and mountain life and go down to San Francisco to enter the hospital.

"Beth's never been just like the rest of us, though," Margaret had declared. "She's been like Joan of Arc, don't you know, seeing visions in her garden. Now Val and Dot and I never think of hospitals or troubles of other people. Lordy, haven't we enough of our own to worry over. But Beth's been bandaging her dolls ever since I can remember, and putting ice bags on their poor little heads. It's too bad because a girl loses all her chances going 'way off like that."

"Chances of what?" Val had asked, interestedly. Val was fifteen, and curious over the vital issues of life. "I think Beth's wonderful."

"Lots of good it will do her shut up in a hospital. The very best they ever do is to marry a doctor," said Margaret vaguely.

Yet Beth had gone down to the hospital for her years of training. That summer she had had her first long visit back home, but when the first tang of coolness came in the fall air, it had called her back to the long white wards, and the duty that was her life.

Her second case was the typhoid one, and it bothered her. She had never before lost her professional grip on herself, but there was something about this brown haired boy lying back on the pillows, his voice pleading with her all through the long hours of the night, that had stirred an unsuspected force lying dormant in her nature.

He was about twenty-six, with face and body that told of clean, right living. Sometimes he called her Carol, sometimes his mother. At first she had tried to quiet him, to turn his mind on something else, when he would beg pitifully for her to stroke his head for him, to slip her cool palm under his cheek so that he could rest. Then he would lay it across his lips, and kiss it. It was all very disconcerting when one was alone, and the hours stole by slowly.

The doctor had told her he had wired for his mother from the East, and she would arrive any time. She wondered if "Carol" would come with her, if she had a right to come. Oddly enough, she began to resent the idea. But the days passed, and no one came for the patient in 12-6.

The day nurse was an old-timer, cheerful and thoroughly used to habits and customs of typhoid cases.

"My goodness, they all make love to you sooner or later," she laughed, when Berth asked her rather shyly if the patient acted strangely in the daytime. "I've had more proposals from my typhoids than any others. It seems to be part of the disease, their falling in love with their nurses."

"Oh, but it isn't with me. He only takes me for somebody else," said Beth, hastily. "He calls me by a girl's name."

"He'll call you by your own before he's sitting up, my dear. About three weeks clears the brain, and they never remember who they loved before. Do you like him?"

Beth flushed hotly, resentfully, and the day nurse laughed.

"Oh, you needn't tell me if you don't want to. I always enjoyed my typhoid cases my first year or two. He does seem a pretty well built youngster, and he talks well, too. Doctors says his name is Randall Sears, and he's from Pittsburgh."

The third week the doctor said they had heard from his mother, and she had been abroad. Beth thought of her a good deal the night of the crisis. He had sunk into a stupor, breathing slowly and tiredly. His forehead was cold and damp. She bent over him after the doctor had made his rounds, and laid her hand on his head, but he did not stir. And a strange thing happened in 12—6 through the weary hours before the gray dawn showed under the window shade. Beth knelt beside her patient, praying over him, talking to him, pleading him to fight against the gray mist that was closing in around him, begging him to hear her and to fight, fight, fight for life.

She did not care then what he called her, his mother, or Carol, or any name, just so long as he listened and heard her, and it gave him strength. Several times she fancied she felt a pressure from the fingers she held in hers, but when he looked at her, his eyes seemed to have lost their brilliancy, and he did not rave any more, only slipped back into the sleep that seemed the last.

It was after four when the doctor came in. He smiled at sight of the night nurse. She was on the chair beside the cot, her hands holding the patient's against her own warm glowing face as if she would have given him some of her strength so.

"Better, nurse?"

"Yes. He's all right, I think. Isn't he sleeping normally now?"

The doctor nodded.

"His mother's down stairs. She can't come up, but she wont go away. You'd better go down and calm her. Tell her he's out of danger now, but can't be seen for a day or two."

She was the only person in the reception room. Plump and rather tall, with beautiful gray hair curling around her fresh young face, and eyes just like the patient's upstairs. Beth caught her breath as they looked at her beseechingly.

"You're Randall's nurse, the doctor tells me. My dear, is he really better?"

"Oh, very much. The crisis is past and he is sleeping normally for the first time, so you see how dangerous and unwise it would be to waken or startle him. And he thinks you were with him anyway." She took the hands outstretched towards her, and went on pluckily. "All through the nights he has called me 'mother,' and 'Carol.'"

"'Carol?'" repeated Mrs. Sears. "He doesn't know anybody named that, I'm sure. 'Carol.' I don't understand it at all."

Beth went back feeling comforted some way. Even his own mother didn't know who Carol was. She began to feel that Carol was a distinct interloper into the family, and as if she herself were a part of it.

The next weeks passed swiftly. As soon as Randall was convalescent, his mother took him to the mountains, and Beth went with them as nurse. Mrs. Sears said she would feel safer to have her near for fear of a relapse, as Randall had acted weak just as soon as he had been told he was to leave the hospital.

And the spring days stretched into June. Beth, who had been born a mountain girl, enjoyed every moment of her freedom. It was part of her patient's daily regime, the long walks, the horseback rides, the games of tennis, and sleeping out of doors. For nearly three months they had seen each other constantly day after day, and when she spoke of leaving to go back to the hospital, he threatened a relapse.

"Why won't you let yourself be frank with me, nurse," he said one day, as they rode slowly toward the lodge. "You know I'll never let you go now."

"It's only a part of the typhoid symptoms," laughed Beth. "Do you know that all through your delirium you made frantic love to me, not exactly to me, either. To—Carol."

It was out at last, and she felt better. But over Randall's face there spread first a look of bewilderment, and then he laughed.

"Did I call you Carol? It was surely delirium. Now listen, dear, and be fair. I've been an everlasting chump. Dad left me money with mother as trustee, and she's been too good to me. I've been writing a play, and called it 'Carol.' It's a pack of nonsense, too, and I fired it before I came down sick. But I suppose the thing ran through my brain."

"But you kissed my hand, and wanted me to——"

Beth hesitated.

"To what?"

"Smooth your hair, and hold your hands, and—and when you were near the crisis, I had to kneel beside you all night, because you wouldn't let go of my hands."

"Great Scott," gasped Randall, "and I had all of that and didn't know it. Beth, get off that pony, just for a minute. I've got to talk to you, I've simply got to. If you don't stop, I'll have a relapse."

"I didn't know this was an incurable case," laughed Beth, reining up, and slipping from her saddle into his arms.

After a minute, Randall answered:

"It's chronic, nurse."